



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence

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Responses to Jim Carland's December FORUM, "Textbooks, Teachers, 'Tails,' and Tyranny" were spirited, as the excerpts printed below demonstrate. Overall, it appears that our first semester with the FACULTY FORUM has been a great success. Many faculty are now referring to the publication in casual conversation and it appears that the FORUM is read by many with considerable interest. Two new opinion pieces are nearly ready for publication, but we encourage all faculty to submit opinion pieces as the spirit moves them. It would be a happy problem to have too many pieces to publish. I also encourage you to submit teaching tips for the middle of the month issue. These practical suggestions can make our daily teaching work much easier, so send over your most helpful tip today!

Excerpts from Faculty Responses

The pieces by Bruce and Jim were interesting and informative. I have found the following to be a valuable guide (source unknown):
"The general principles of any study you may learn by books, at home;
but the detail,
the colour,
the tone,
the air,
the life which makes it live in us,
you must catch all these from those in whom it already lives."
Thus the teacher. . . .

Gary Pool, Chemistry/Physics

I'm tempted to continue the debate, but, in the interest of brevity, I'll forgo the fun. The last two lines of Jim's rebuttal are, "It has often been said that the best way to learn a subject is to teach it. I suggest that writing a text is even better." This advice is as appropriate for students as it is for teachers, and it captures my concern about textbooks. If teachers deepen their knowledge by tackling the challenge of finding structure and organization for their material, then students likewise will learn more when they wrestle with raw material. But that doesn't leave much of a market for textbooks, does it.

Bruce Henderson, Psychology

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It seems to me that what is true of textbooks in one field may not be true in another. Thus, sweeping generalizations should be avoided. Bruce Henderson and Jim Carland may both be correct even as they disagree.

Lee Minor, Mathematics

Well, it's good to see that some of the faculty are not asleep! I think Jim Carland's rebuttal to Bruce Henderson's point on textbooks was well expressed.

Dan Pittillo, Biology

Jim has done an admirable job of defending his position. One argument omitted is that the text provides a common resource for all students in the class. It allows them to share individual thoughts, questions, and concerns from a common base of knowledge. It also permits them to return again and again to read and re-read material until true understanding occurs. Unlike primary resources, it does not presuppose knowledge of the field or of research strategies (a point especially important to beginning students in a field).

Finally, a good textbook provides a coherent framework for attacking a large body of knowledge. It does not replace the need for teacher organization and structure but can enhance such organization and structure. It also does not replace the need for reading primary sources, which most teachers require in addition to the text. In short, good textbooks are indispensable tools for teachers and students.

Anonymous Administrator

I commend both Dr. Henderson and Dr. Carland, one for directing faculty attention toward the problems of overdependence on texts, and the other for reminding us all that we should (1) review textbooks with scrupulous care, and (2) write better textbooks where they are needed.

Steve Eberly, English